

Puerto Ricans can determine the islands' future status.

The United States has a responsibility to answer such questions. Successive Presidents, and the Congress in 1998, have supported the people of Puerto Rico in determining their status preference from among options that are not incompatible with the Constitution and basic laws and policies of the United States. I have made it the policy of the executive branch to work with the leaders of the Commonwealth and the Congress to enable Puerto Ricans to choose their future status. We also have the responsibility to help Puerto Ricans obtain the necessary transitional legislation toward a new status, if chosen.

To ensure that the Federal Government continues to address the fundamental question concerning the islands until it is resolved, by the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including Public Law 106-346, I have today issued an Executive Order establishing the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status (President's Task Force) and further direct as follows:

1. The Co-Chairs of the President's Task Force shall conduct an ongoing dialogue with the Governor and Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico's major political parties and other groups that advocate a change in the islands' status, and the Chairs and Ranking Minority Members of the House of Representatives Committee on Resources and the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. This dialogue shall focus on the options for Puerto Rico's future status and the process by which Puerto Ricans can realize such an option. It shall seek to facilitate communications among the offices that the aforementioned officials represent on matters relating to the status of the Commonwealth, and ensure official attention to, and facilitate action on, such matters. In particular, the dialogue shall seek to clarify the options for Puerto Rico's future status and enable Puerto Ricans to choose among those options.

2. The Co-Chairs of the President's Task Force shall monitor the expenditure of funds for public education on and a public choice among Puerto Rico's status options pursuant to Public Law 106-346. This monitoring shall include ensuring that educational materials are accurate, objective, and non-partisan and that they are consistent with the standards set forth in the Executive Order entitled "Establishment of the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status."
3. The heads of executive departments and agencies shall cooperate with the Co-Chairs in fulfilling the assignments provided for herein and in the accompanying Executive Order.

William J. Clinton

Christmas Greeting to the Nation

December 24, 2000

The President. On this holiest of holidays, Hillary and I would like to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas. Tonight we gather with family and friends to reflect on our good fortune, rejoice in the memories of the year past, and look forward with hope to the days ahead.

And we give thanks to America's men and women in uniform, who are spending this holiday protecting freedom around the world.

The First Lady. And we also remember those who are too often left behind, because Christmas isn't just about getting gifts; it's about the miracle of giving them. As we enjoy our last Christmas in the White House, the President, Chelsea, and I are profoundly grateful for the gift you've given our family, the privilege of serving your family these last 8 years.

The President. So from our family to yours, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The greeting was videotaped at approximately 4 p.m. in the Map Room on December 19 for later broadcast, and the transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 22 but was embargoed for release until 12:01 a.m., December 24. These remarks were

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Statement on Signing the Shark Finning Prohibition Act

December 26, 2000

I have signed H.R. 5461, the “Shark Finning Prohibition Act.” Shark-finning is the taking of a shark, removing the fin, and returning the carcass to the sea. This legislation prohibits shark-finning in all U.S. waters; provides for initiation of international negotiations to prohibit shark-finning; and authorizes research to conserve shark populations.

The Administration has actively supported the prohibition of shark-finning because of the harmful impact on sharks and shark populations. The practice has been administratively banned in the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea. H.R. 5461 will establish the ban in law and extend it to the Pacific Ocean.

The United States has been a leading proponent of international shark conservation at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and has advocated prohibiting wasteful fishing practices, including shark finning. We have also demonstrated considerable leadership in other international fora to conserve sharks and ban shark-finning. In the Eastern Pacific, the United States has been active in the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission in dealing effectively with issues such as shark management on the high seas. And the United States has been participating, along with thirty other countries, in the High-Level Multilateral Conferences for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Species in the Western and Central Pacific. Finally, the United States plans to continue in its efforts at the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas to obtain a proposal that would ban shark-finning, as well as implement a variety of conservation measures.

Only through international cooperation can effective management be ensured for sharks, especially on the high seas. The United States will intensify efforts to convince other countries to join in prohibiting shark finning, consistent with the goals of H.R. 5461.

I note, however, that two provisions of the bill raise constitutional concerns. Because the Constitution vests the conduct of foreign